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ABSTRACT

Because of the increasing diversity of ethnic, cultural, religious, and socioeconomic groups in public schools, the preparation of teachers for multiethnic, multicultural settings is a critical issue facing teacher educators. This study investigated preservice early childhood education students' definitions of multicultural education, sources of information from which they constructed their definitions, how multicultural education was actually implemented in school, and their perceptions of the ways multicultural education should be implemented. Participating in the study were 103 students at different points during a 4-year undergraduate program. Their responses to a 4-item open-ended questionnaire indicated that students' definitions illustrated minimal understanding and conceptualizations of multicultural education limited to issues related to race and ethnicity. A majority of respondents constructed their definitions from college courses, suggesting that universities may have tremendous influences on student attitudes toward diversity. Participants witnessed multicultural education on a limited basis in the school sites and were confronted with incongruencies between the diversity perspective advocated in university course work and in their field experiences. (Contains 29 references.) (KB)

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Running Head: MULTICULTURAL JOURNEY

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Understanding Diversity: How Do Early Childhood Preservice Educators Construct their Definitions of Diversity

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Abstract

This study investigated preservice early childhood education students' (a) definitions of multicultural education; (b) sources of information from which to construct their definition; (c) multicultural education in schools; and (d) perceptions of ways multicultural education should be implemented. The 103 participants at different levels of a four-year undergraduate program completed an open-ended four item questionnaire that revealed important findings and insights into students' developmental thinking. Responses indicated that students' definitions illustrated minimal understanding and conceptualizations of multicultural education limited to mainly race and ethnicity. A majority of respondents constructed their definitions from college courses suggesting that universities may have a tremendous influence in student attitudes toward diversity. Participants witnessed multicultural education on a limited basis in the school sites and were confronted with incongruencies between the diversity perspective advocated in university course work and field experiences, viewed as a series of discrete events in the field. This study suggests that students in all levels of professional development continue to struggle with multicultural education. Teacher education programs must assist students in their conceptualization and critical reflection on multicultural education by capitalizing on opportunities throughout the students' experiences for them to critically reflect and examine their own and other's experiences regarding diversity.

Understanding Diversity: How Do Early Childhood Preservice Educators Construct their Definitions of Diversity

As we move toward the beginning of the next millennium and societal demands for incorporating diverse perspectives into nearly all of our interactions increase, teacher educators are confronted with an imperative to prepare preservice teachers for teaching in this diverse world. The multicultural education movement has particular relevance for the 1990s and beyond because of the increasing diversity of ethnic, cultural, religious, and socioeconomic groups in public schools (Sleeter, 1996). These changing demographics present challenges that should move university teacher education programs toward the preparation of preservice teachers whose training meets the needs of all children in society. Along with changes in societal demographics, the public schools are undergoing a shift that involves a more diverse and increasing proportion of students enrolling in schools from groups, previously underrepresented. At the same time the proportion of white teachers is increasing (Campbell, 1996; Fox & Gay, 1995; Marshall, 1996; National Education Association, 1992; Olmedo, 1997). This phenomenon increase the likelihood that teachers in the public schools will be teaching students whose cultural backgrounds differ greatly from their own. Yet, the research evidence suggests that are a number of concerns with preservice teacher preparation and multicultural education.

A recent survey by the Association of Teacher Educators indicated that "preparing teachers for multiethnic, multicultural settings" was one of the three most critical issues facing universities. The report also suggested that preservice teachers are not being prepared for such settings in teacher education programs (Buttery, Haberman, & Houston, 1990). Most preservice teacher education programs educate undergraduates to work effectively with one socioeconomic group, the middle class, as well as one culture-the mainstream or dominant culture (Cannella & Reiff, 1994a; Gollnick & Chin, 1998). As Grant (1993) noted, many teacher education programs focus limited or no attention on diversity and even have faculty who claim that their programs are infused with multicultural education

while in reality that attention appears to be minimal. Such perceptions foster negative outcomes for multicultural education.

McDiarmid & Price (1990) found that multicultural courses in teacher education programs may actually contribute to preservice teachers' stereotyping of minority students. Cross (1993) suggested that when teacher educators explicitly try to prepare students to teach in racially diverse schools, students are uncomfortable discussing race. Further, students may ultimately formulate conclusions from their field experiences, even in diverse settings, that confirm their initial prejudices and misunderstandings (Cross, 1993). Work by Garcia and Pugh (1992) indicated that students had difficulty viewing their cooperating teachers as models who embrace a multicultural perspective or utilize multicultural teaching practices.

McCall (1995) noted that preservice teachers often do not consider multicultural education to be important resulting in little effect on the preservice teacher's attitudes. Even when teacher preparation programs offer opportunities for teacher educators to become more aware of their background, explain their conceptions, and articulate their concerns (McCall, 1995), research overwhelmingly suggests that preservice teacher education programs, in general, do not alter students attitudes and beliefs. Indeed, there is much to be said about the relatively short amount of time in which teacher education programs can influence students in comparison to the 18 to 20 years of formative experience that students have before post-secondary education (Jordan, 1995).

However, there is some evidence that indicates programs with particular features may have an impact on aspects of teacher development (Larkin & Sleeter, 1995; Zeichner, 1991). Multicultural teacher education programs that infuse a multicultural perspective across the curricula (in the arts and sciences and professional courses) and field experiences will be more effective. There is mounting evidence that teacher preparation programs that incorporate diversity issues from the beginning of the professional sequence of methodology courses are more likely to produce teachers that reflect on their practices (Barry & Lechner, 1995). Self-critique in teacher education programs as a means to shape

students' practice also warrants attention as an effective means to challenge white educators to explore their biases and how those are reflected in classroom practice (Davis, 1995; Olmedo, 1997; Pearson, Neuharth-Pritchett, & Reiff, 1998). Through critical reflection preservice teachers may "reinvent teacher education programs" although the field must focus on incremental steps toward that goal (McIntyre, 1997). As Liston & Zeichner (1990) state, teacher educators are often conservative, fear alienating their students who frequently support the status quo, fear alienating K-12 school personnel with whom they must work, and fear tensions that arise from an approach critical of existing institutions and society. Yet, changing attitudes and behavior is a slow and difficult process and teacher education programs are only one source of information from which students formulate their perspectives. Moreover, this responsibility must also be shared by society (Deering & Stanutz, 1995).

Our society was founded on democratic principles that explicitly respect and value individual differences and equality. Schools are institutions that either inhibit or promote the strengths of citizens in a democratic society (Banks, 1994; Gollnick & Chin, 1998). Educators need to cultivate in their preservice students a respect for diversity and an understanding of the responsibilities that they have as members of a pluralistic democracy (Campbell, 1996; Larkin & Sleeter, 1995). Multicultural education must include the social, political, and economic realities related to schooling and, consequently, to teacher preparation (Campbell, 1996; Cannella & Reiff, 1994a & b; Reiff & Canella, 1992). Therefore, teachers should be educated to promote the principles of equality and justice by creating a learning environment for all students, regardless of ethic group, racial identity, or socioeconomic status (Banks, 1994; Banks, 1999; 1994; Sleeter & Grant, 1994).

This paper examines the extent to which preservice teacher education students at different levels of a four-year undergraduate program (a) defined multicultural education; (b) identified the sources of information for constructing their definition; (c) witnessed multicultural education in schools; and (d) perceived ways in which multicultural education should be implemented. Implications for teacher

education programs are highlighted.

Method

Participants

Participants in this study ranged in age from 20 to 35 years. The mean age for the group was 22.04 years (Sd=1.85). Of the 103 participants who completed the survey, 102 were female and one was male. With regard to ethnicity, the composition of the group included 93 Caucasian/White, 5 African-American/Black, 1 Hispanic/Latino-American, 3 Asian-American, and 1 student who did not supply any data. Students were asked to indicate their socioeconomic information and most classified themselves as middle-class.

The mean grade point average for the participants was 3.35 (Sd=.26) and ranged from 2.76 to 4.0. Fifty-five of the 103 participants reported that a member of the family was involved in the education profession (e.g., teachers, administrators), while 48 reported that no member of the family was involved in the education process.

The students were enrolled in their professional sequence of course work in an undergraduate early childhood education program (Prekindergarten through Grade 5) that proceeded through four levels. It should be noted that most often, the instructors for the students' classes were white, middle-class females who exhibited varying levels of commitment to the ideals of multiculturalism. Students accepted into the early childhood education program began their education coursework in Level I as juniors. Level I coursework focused on the students as a teacher-learner with reflections on preprofessional experiences and emerging teaching philosophy. Students were introduced to the concepts of developmentally appropriate practices. In Level II students discussed diversity and concentrated on multicultural issues and teaching strategies. Level III exposed students to the planning and assessment aspects of teaching, student-teacher relationships, and management and organization of classrooms. The Level IV experience was a 10-week student teaching internship.

Students participated in field experiences before entrance into the program. Acceptance into the program required 40 hours of preprofessional experiences that including opportunities such as tutoring, after-school care, camp counseling, and volunteering at schools. Upon acceptance into the program, formal field experiences began in Level III where students were responsible for the design and implementation of a five-day integrated unit. Students received feedback about their teaching with the classroom cooperating teacher and a university supervisor. Concurrently, students attended weekly seminars at the university. The undergraduate program culminates in a 10-week field placement in which students gradually assume all teaching responsibilities leading to a solo-teaching period. Weekly seminars are conducted in the field by university supervisors and teachers at the elementary schools.

During the field placements, preservice teachers gain experiences in both urban and rural settings in a variety of grade levels (Prekindergarten-Kindergarten, 1-2 grade, and 3-5 grade). Urban settings closer to the university generally afford experiences with more culturally, ethnically, and economically diverse populations. Rural settings, outside of the university area, are typically less diverse ethnically and are generally population by Caucasian students. However, socioeconomic status as well as differing family configurations are elements of diversity in the rural placements. Although attempts have been made to vary the field placement settings, many of the undergraduates spend a significant portion of their field work in homogeneously ability-grouped classrooms.

During Levels I, II, and II, in addition to their early childhood education classes, the students were enrolled in content-area classes including Language Education, Math Education, Reading Education, Science Education, and Social Science Education. Because of the departmentalized structure of the college, communication among instructors was limited and posed particular challenges in addressing areas such as the inclusion of multiculturalism. Each instructor was, therefore, relatively unaware of how other instructors discussed multicultural issues in their courses. In addition, it is difficult to make conclusions about each instructor's commitment to multiculturalism and its ultimate

impact on the outcome of the results of this study.

Participants in this study came from all four levels of the program. The number of students in Levels I, II, III, and IV were 15, 33, 21, and 34, respectively. Data were collected in January and February of 1998.

Measure

In order to elicit the greatest number of responses as well as depth of responses, the measure constructed for this investigation was comprised of four open-ended questions that were designed to assess students' understanding and interpretations of multicultural education. These questions included:

1. There are many definitions of multicultural education and diversity. In your own words, please provide a description or definition of what you consider multicultural education to be.
2. How did you construct your definition of multicultural education (please include formal training and school-related experiences that have helped you mold your definition)?
3. If you have seen ways that multiculturalism has been used in schools, please provide at least three examples of how this was done or what you observed.
4. What is your perception of how multiculturalism should be promoted in school settings?

Analysis Strategy

Students completed the questionnaire in January and February of 1998. Data were categorized for the defining multicultural education question into three distinct a-priori levels. A specific description of these levels is presented in the discussion of the results for that question. For the three remaining questions, data were open-coded for themes. Overarching themes and categories were created and data were reevaluated for their placement in these categories. Two individuals coded the data independently (inter-rater agreement for those ratings was 95-98% agreement). Any discrepancy between the ratings of the two independent raters was discussed and ultimately coded into one specific theme. Data were tallied and reported in relation to the number of students from each level with a given response. Selected

quotes that exemplify responses for a given category are provided for the reader to judge the evidentiary value of the responses.

Findings and Preliminary Conclusions

Defining Multicultural Education

Participants responded to an open-ended question that required students to supply a brief summary of how they defined multicultural education. These responses differed in their depth and breadth and suggested that there was a continuum on which a given student's response could be found. These data were then coded into three categories that included minimal demonstration of understanding, moderate demonstration of understanding, and strong demonstration of understanding of multicultural education. These data are represented in Table 1.

Students whose responses were categorized as a minimal definition of multicultural education provided definitions that: (a) focused on a surface-level understanding, (b) suggested few components or examples, (c) illustrated little or no developmental thought on the role of diversity, and (d) suggested a response that could be mimicked or memorized. This response category also pictured culture in general terms.

Moderate demonstration of understanding were categorized by responses that included: (a) more illustrations of elements of diversity, (b) some developmental thought on the role of diversity, and (c) a more personalized tone that indicated a level of critical self-analysis. Strong definitions of diversity included (a) recognition of many elements of diversity, (b) an internalization of the role of and a responsibility to incorporate multicultural education in classroom practices, and (c) development of thought on the role of diversity that suggested integration of such perspectives into classroom practice

Of the students whose responses were coded as demonstrating a minimal understanding of multicultural education, approximately 39% of the total participants provided definitions and were placed in this category. Examining the proportion of students from across the four levels indicates that a

large number of students from each of the four levels provided a minimal demonstration of understanding of multicultural education. It may be expected that students in the lower levels who have not had significant exposure to course work and limited related field experiences would present minimally understood definitions. It is unexpected, however, to note the proportion of students from the Levels III and IV whose responses indicated minimal understanding of multicultural education.

Given the fact that the Level III curriculum contains a four-week field experience occurring in the quarter prior to the student teaching experience and that the Level IV student teaching experience is a ten-week field experience, it would be expected that students should be able to provide a more comprehensive definition than their peers enrolled in classes at the start of the program. The participants' responses indicated that slightly over 33% of Level III students and slightly over 35% of Level IV students (student teachers) provided minimal definitions. One possible explanation for this phenomenon may be that the students' beliefs are so entrenched that neither the university course work nor the field experience can influence a more comprehensive perspective on multicultural education. In addition, given the homogeneity of the population of the students in the study, it might be concluded that the course work and field experiences are truly the first time that students' assumptions about diversity are challenged.

Students' responses categorized as demonstrating a moderate level of understanding of multicultural education represented the largest proportion of students and it is the only category that may suggest that there is developmental growth over the course of program study for students. Specifically more students in Levels III and IV, who are in the sequence of course work where there is an accompanying field experience, supplied answers that illustrated more comprehensive definitions of multicultural education. Slightly over half of the students in Levels III and IV had responses that were categorized as moderate, while only 33% and 39% of students in Levels I and II, respectively, demonstrated such understanding.

It is important to note, however, that it is not necessarily an expectation that students obtain strong definitions of multicultural education by the time they leave their professional sequence of course work at the university. Indeed, the program of study is designed to initiate students' critical reflection on their perceptions of diversity and guide in their inclusion of these issues in their practice. Only 16% of the entire population of students in the study demonstrated a strong understanding of multicultural education. Within the category, there is an expectation that the number of responses of strong demonstrations of understanding would be associated with the students who were completing their formal student teaching. However, this group represents the smallest proportion of students at all levels of understanding. This effect is difficult to explain and may be attributed to many factors such as a discrepancy between students' formative understandings and realizations after field-based experiences, the mirroring of their cooperating teacher's perspective on multicultural education, or reliance on their own limited lived experiences with diversity, as well as the way they were taught.

Insert Table 1 about here

Sources for Constructing Definition

Data for this question are found in Table 2. Students overwhelmingly credited college course work including texts and instructors for their knowledge of multicultural education . One particular class, a children's literature class, was identified most often as a source of information for their definition of multicultural education. It suggests that the students positively perceive the university course work as an important source of information on diversity issues. The college course work in all of the levels has an underlying focus on incorporating diverse perspectives. Specifically, the Level I and Level III courses have direct instruction in diversity. In Level I, the students are introduced to individual differences, stressors of childhood, and the purpose of reflecting on their perspectives of diverse populations. In the Level III course, students focus on children's learning styles, multiple intelligences,

and practical applications of incorporating diversity in classroom planning and instruction. It is significant that such large proportions of students stated that college course work was a major source of information for constructing their definition. Indeed, it may suggest the tremendous influence that the university has in assisting the construction of student attitudes toward diversity.

A smaller proportion of students cited self-reflection or lived experiences as a source of information for the construction of their definition of multicultural education. The data are consistent with the focus of the course work as well. For example, the Level I course content includes presenting students with the importance of reflecting on their practice. The data from Level I students indicated that self-reflection is an activity that assists the students in constructing their definition.

The data from the students in the other three levels suggests that students have had limited experiences with diversity issues or fail to see their own lived experiences as relevant sources of information in their classroom practice. Most of the quotes provided by the students who suggested that beliefs or lived experiences were important did not provide adequate description of exactly how the lived experiences were incorporated in their definitions. However, students who did rely heavily on their beliefs or lived experiences did provide the depth of explanation as to why this element was important in their definition construction. It is interesting to note that of the students who cited lived experiences as being important, the majority of this group were from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Two examples of quotes from these students are provided.

> I am from South Africa and I am Jewish so I have very different experiences than many Americans. I feel that Americans need to be more open and less ignorant about other cultures.

> I constructed my definition through my own personal experience. I grew up as the only Asian student in my elementary school. Although I was never excluded, my culture was never included. I wish the teachers would have taken the time to explore my culture.

Relatively few students cited the construction of their definition as stemming from their parents or other significant mentors in their lives. Of the 103 participants, only 10 students noted this influence. These individuals cited the direct teaching of moral values and a basic belief in equality of all people. Some examples of their responses included:

> I have developed my definition... from a moral obligation stemming from being taught to treat all people fairly.

> From the time I was old enough to see and talk my parents never acted differently when exposed to "other" people. This did not matter if they were black, white, green, or purple!! Other people were simply respected and this is the way that life is supposed to be.

The fact that so few preservice teachers cited the influence of their parents and other significant individuals in their lives should alert those that educate preservice teachers to the difficulty that some teacher education graduates will have in fostering a diverse perspective in their classroom practices. Moreover, the internalization of beliefs whether they foster appreciation for diverse groups or whether they inhibit preservice teachers from acceptance of others may ultimately translate into the graduates' formal practice.

The final category in which preservice teachers derived their definition of multicultural education was from their experiences in the classroom or other field-based settings. Eighteen of the 103 preservice teachers commented that the classroom experiences, they had in methodology classes in their program, influenced their definition. There appears to be relatively little importance placed on

experiences acquired in the field in terms of how students perceive diversity issues. This may be a reflection of the field settings in which students are placed. Specifically, students may have been placed in very homogeneous classrooms in which natural opportunities were minimized for development of a multicultural perspective. The opposite extreme also may be true as students may have been placed in diverse settings but did not observe nor witness environments that illustrated a strong commitment to multicultural education.

Insert Table 2 about here

Observed Implementation of Multicultural Education

Five general categories emerged with regard to the way that preservice teachers observed implementation of multicultural education in the schools. These first four categories included materials, isolated events, curriculum, and inclusion. A fifth category was also present and indicated a number of students did not observe implementation of multicultural education in school settings. These data are represented in Table 3.

Participants who cited materials as a means to incorporate diversity in the classroom noted such things as children's literature representing diversity, bulletin boards (specifically addressing multicultural issues or illustrating other cultures or races), maps, pictures, and posters. The percentages of students in the four levels who noted that materials were a way to incorporate diversity ranged from 27% to 52%.

Students also indicated that isolated events in the school were utilized to incorporate diversity. These events included Black History Month, Famous Black Americans, cultural fairs, sharing time in the classroom, food tasting parties and activities, assemblies, and holiday celebrations. Of the 103 participants, slightly over 62% indicated these events as a way to incorporate diversity in the classroom. These data may indicate that participants perceived multicultural education as an "add-on" to the

curriculum and not an educational approach that integrates diversity into all elements of the curriculum. This perspective may contribute to the students' perceptions of promoting "the exotic nature" of varying cultures as opposed to promoting the meaningful contributions of all cultures. Moreover, the use of isolated events serves to condition young children that diversity issues are comprised of extraneous events instead of a representation in daily practice.

With regard to curriculum, only a third of all participants included the inclusion of curriculum-driven approaches in their description of how they see diversity incorporated in schools. Curriculum citations included the use of diversity in the context of a lesson or unit of study, integrated curriculum that included diverse perspectives, and fostering studies that included more than the Euro-American point of view. It is apparent from these data, that students did not have sufficient modeling of how to effectively include multicultural perspectives in their instruction. The evidence suggests that isolated events were more common than a deeper commitment to teaching with multicultural world-view.

A few students also cited inclusion as a method of multicultural education implementation. While this represents the deepest level of understanding on diversity, few students actually experienced classrooms where a multicultural perspective permeated the classroom environment. Although students had extensive field placements, it is evident that they were placed in settings where diversity issues were not included. This presents the preservice teacher with a dissonant outlook on what university instructors are endorsing and what actually occurs in practice. With only slightly over 11% of the students observing inclusion models of diversity, it may be hypothesized that the other 89% of the students would develop perspectives that reflect their experiences in the field. The data present a bleak picture in that while so few have seen diversity issues included in the classroom, a similar percentage of students indicated that they had never witnessed multiculturalism in their schooling experiences.

In summary, the way that multicultural education is perceived in school settings tends to foster superficial understanding of how diversity should be included as a focus of curriculum. These

perspectives impede the development of the preservice teacher in terms of obtaining a diverse outlook on the delivery and appropriateness of instruction and practice. Indeed, preservice teachers are being confronted with the incongruence between the diversity perspective advocated in university course work and diversity experiences they have in the field.

Insert Table 3 about here

Ideal Implementation of Multicultural Education

Seven general categories of responses emerged from the data with regard to the perceptions of how multicultural education should be integrated in the school setting. The data are represented in Table 4. One-quarter of the students suggested that the ideal way that multicultural education should be implemented was through exposure to or knowledge of other cultures. This means that the students will be exposed to diversity concepts but still lack the comprehensiveness of full integration in classroom practices. As one student commented,

> I think that multiculturalism should be used in school settings to further educate the students. It is important that the student know what else is in the world other than their city. Students need to know other countries, where they are, and what is occurring around them. Current events deal with other countries and we hear about them daily. Students should be familiar with these places and they should have some idea of what these places are like and an idea of their customs.

Another approach advocated by the students was the implementation of anti-bias curriculum. Only 12 students advanced this as an option. Anti-bias curriculum was defined by the respondents as approaching curriculum from a variety of perspectives and not always of the Euro-American point of view. Fifty percent of the students recommended inclusion or integration of diversity concepts in classroom instruction. This curriculum would be fully integrated in classroom practices and speaks to

the content of instruction as well as the method. One student remarked,

> Multiculturalism should pervade our school setting. We must incorporate into every activity. It should not be something that is recognized or celebrated at only certain times of the year. Everyone must take an active part and put forth effort if this type of education is going to occur. From principals to custodians, everyone can participate in making it a reality.

Thirty-nine students suggested that certain attitudes or ways of interacting be taught to the students. These included respect, tolerance, awareness, appreciation, recognition of similarities and differences, and acceptance. These activities, however, seemed to be expressed as a more passive approach that required little more than an attitude change. In addition, no concrete strategies were offered as to how to facilitate these attitudes rather only that children should adopt them. Eight students also mentioned that instruction in negating stereotypes would be a viable way to integrate a multicultural perspective in the classroom.

Another strategy offered by students indicated that segregated units of instruction, similar to isolated events, could meet the needs of students in classroom. For example, students offered suggestions that special units on holidays or guest speakers alone would foster a multicultural environment. Fifteen students perceived that the focus of diversity in classrooms should be given minor consideration as a part of the curriculum or indicated that it was of no importance because multicultural education has been "overemphasized." Both responses suggest that the ideal implementation would be of minor importance or should be a segregated rather than inclusive element of classroom practice. One student noted,

> I feel it is important for this to be used, however, it does not need to be run into the ground.

Regardless of the strategy promoted, relatively few students made the connection between the importance of the university course work's focus on multicultural education and that of the field. Moreover, it is difficult to ascertain whether the students are reflecting on the observable models in schools or whether they revert to the most comfortable tendencies of instruction that are similar to their own experiences as learners.

Insert Table 4 about here

Implications and Discussion

Defining Multicultural Education

By asking students to define multicultural education, the participants in this study have provided useful information as to how preservice teachers conceptualize multicultural education. While the approach cannot fully capture students' thinking or how multicultural education is viewed in schools, the answers to the questions provide valuable insights into the developmental thinking of students.

The findings of this study suggest that teacher education programs must move toward helping students acquire more complex definitions or constructions of multicultural education through their experiences in the university classroom and field-based settings. These conceptualizations should be formulated to assist students to examine their personal experiences and recognize that diversity is not limited to race and ethnicity, as indicated by these participants, but that natural diversity is a component of seemingly homogeneous groups. Specifically, instruction in critical reflection and examination of one's individual perspectives may foster receptiveness to included all elements of diversity (e.g., socio-economic status, religion, gender). Moreover, such critical reflection may promote students to gain a "personal stake" in diversity. That is, a personal connection to the importance and complexity of diversity.

Participant's responses indicated that the field settings provided limited explicit experiences for

promoting student reflection on multicultural education as it applies to classroom practices. In some situations, students noted ambiguity and even defiance toward multicultural education by their cooperating classroom teachers. These powerful experiences with teachers in the field may go a long way in shaping the students early thoughts on multicultural education that ultimately impact their subsequent interactions with children and within classroom settings. These sentiments are summarized by one student

> It seems that many teacher resent multicultural emphasis or at least it is not a priority. I have heard, "Kwanzaa, I don't think so!, I have enough to do." and other similar things. There is a notable racist undertone at least with the teachers I have spent time with here. There is little respect for behaviors that result from different cultural upbringing.

It is important to acknowledge the different viewpoints that exist in classrooms in which students are placed for their field experiences. Although students may be placed in classrooms with teachers who foster diverse perspectives, they are sometimes placed in classrooms where diversity issues are not fully recognized. Therefore, we advocate critical analysis of these experiences. This result is similar to other empirical findings supported by researchers in this area (Liston & Zeichner, 1990; McIntyre, 1997). Indeed, reflection on the variety of experiences in which students may compare and contrast teachers' differing styles may be a vehicle for discourse on diversity issues. Then students may ultimately have a stronger foundation and knowledge from which to construct their own perspectives and internalize their commitment to multicultural education.

Sources for Constructing Definition

Students suggested a number of sources from which they constructed their definition of multicultural education. The data indicated that students relied heavily on university course instruction as one of the main sources of information. One unexpected finding was the students' low reliance on their personal background and experiences as sources for constructing their definition. It may be that the

students considered themselves as part of the dominant cultural and this perspective in conjunction with a view of multicultural education as only race or culture did not challenge the students to consider alternative perspectives. Students perceive their own experiences as the norm and not as a rich source of information from which to draw opinions about diversity. Ultimately this fostered a "diversity as them" attitude rather than viewing "self" as a source for constructing the definition of diversity. It appeared that students did not understand the role that their own upbringing and biases played in constructing their definition. Given this assumption, it proved difficult for students to accept challenges to their viewpoints and thus their personal perspectives became further solidified. Coupled with experiences in university classrooms where they were confronted with a viewpoint unlike their own, students could not contend with the disequilibrium and, therefore, relied on their previous constructions.

While college course work was cited as a source of information for constructing the students' definitions, the students did not acquire the skills in which to reflect upon the discrepancies between university emphases and some field experiences. University personnel should make efforts to consistently equip students with strategies to effectively contend with such incongruencies. Even though significant attempts by the university are made to assist students with diversity in schools, these practices are limited by the schools in which students work. These schools are impacted by community views as well as society as a whole. This findings parallel work by Deering & Stanutz (1995). Further, the result that suggests the goal of the university should be to assist students with beginning the journey of critically and consistently reflecting on their experiences in diverse settings is consistent with the findings of other researchers (Larkin & Sleeter, 1995; Campbell, 1996). In addition, working with classroom cooperating teachers should also be a mission of the university to provide a comprehensive approach to preservice teacher education. This attempt facilitates a dual approach in that the preservice teacher is being prepared with university course work that is complemented by enriched perspectives in cooperation with classroom teachers in the field.

Observed versus Ideal Implementation

Students' responses to how multicultural education was incorporated in schools indicated that the students saw diversity as a series of discrete events as opposed to being an integral part of a teacher or school's philosophy and practices. Some of these discrete events included cultural fairs, highlighting Black History Month, holiday celebrations and guest speakers. In addition, the multicultural materials that students suggested included bulletin boards and children's literature books. Taken together, both isolated events and use of materials seemed to indicate an approach utilized by many cooperating teachers that did not fully integrate multicultural materials or events into the curriculum. Therefore, university programs should foster approaches that assist preservice students in developing a repertoire of culturally responsive or learner-sensitive strategies that focus on integration of events and materials.

Such strategies may include placing preservice students in settings that are diverse and preparing them more effectively to critically reflect on the observations and techniques used by the cooperating teacher. This critical reflection should extend to comparing and contrasting models of teacher behavior from the students' field experiences. Even settings that have narrowly-defined multicultural education may benefit students' formulation of their perceptions of multicultural education. Students who witness a variety of models have more opportunities from which to foster their beliefs and attitudes toward multicultural education. University and school-based personnel should continuously provide opportunities for preservice teachers to examine and critique their own and other's experiences regarding diversity throughout their preservice teacher preparation.

Teacher educator programs should foster an understanding of inclusion as a natural product of classroom environments. Specifically, a number of students in this study mentioned or highlighted racial or ethnic definitions of diversity alone, while other students expressed concerns about this narrow focus. This limited view by cooperating teachers and schools did not include diversity issues that relate to socioeconomic status, gender, children with special needs, or underrepresented cultures (e.g., Hispanic

families, Native Americans). Therefore, teacher education programs should enable students to become critical consumers of information by examining curriculum for its representative nature, fostering positive perspectives of individual differences, and selecting anti-bias textbooks and resource materials for their classroom. The analysis of multicultural case studies is an excellent strategy for assisting students in understanding their own beliefs and attitudes as well as for developing skills in working with diverse students (Metcalf-Turner, 1997). Along with being critical consumers of information, preservice teachers need opportunities to develop an anti-bias or democratic focus and wrestle with the discrepancies between university perspectives and school-based practices (Campbell, 1996; Banks, 1999)

Summary

All of these culturally responsible strategies may lead preservice teachers to view multicultural education as more of a discipline as opposed to a list of isolated components. Students and faculty, alike, by deconstructing their own beliefs and critically analyzing their practices begin the journey toward reconceptualizing schooling that values the uniqueness and contributions of all individuals. Teacher education programs must play a critical role in the education of preservice teachers as well as influence the reform of our schools to more adequately reflect the complexity of our society. The unique contribution of this study suggests that students in all levels of their professional development continue to struggle with multicultural education. There are a number of factors that despite students' tenure in a teacher education program continue to hinder internalization of multicultural education. Although one may expect to see a developmental trend in students' ability to define and incorporate multicultural education into their classroom practice, this study illustrated that this was not the case. Therefore, teacher education programs must capitalize on opportunities throughout students' formative experiences, from beginning to end-from course work to field placements, to assist students in their conceptualization and continued reflection on multicultural education.

By planting the initial seeds and providing opportunities for development, teacher education

programs assist preservice teachers with this growth process. Continuing on the path of education that reflects a multicultural view and fosters and incorporates diversity, teacher education programs may promote students who initiate actions that impact not only their classrooms, but the community, and also their society.

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Table 1
Frequency and Proportion of Participant Responses to Definition of Multicultural Education.

	Minimal Demonstration of Understanding		Moderate Demonstration of Understanding		Strong Demonstration of Understanding	
	Frequency	Proportion of Level	Frequency	Proportion of Level	Frequency	Proportion of Level
Level I	7	46.67	5	33.33	3	20.00
Level II*	14	42.42	13	39.39	6	18.18
Level III	7	33.33	11	52.38	3	14.29
Level IV*	12	35.29	18	52.94	4	11.76

*Row totals may not equal 100 due to rounding

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Table 2
Frequency and Percentage of Participant Responses to Sources for Constructing Multicultural Definition

	College Classes		Self-Reflections/ Lived Experiences		Parents and Other Mentors		Classroom/ Field Experiences	
	Frequency	Percentage of Students with Response in Level	Frequency	Percentage of Students with Response in Level	Frequency	Percentage of Students with Response in Level	Frequency	Percentage of Students with Response in Level
Level I	12	80.00	6	40.00	3	20.00	2	13.33
Level II	15	45.45	5	15.15	0	0	2	6.06
Level III	20	95.24	4	19.05	2	9.52	6	28.57
Level IV	23	67.65	5	14.71	5	14.71	8	23.53

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Table 3

Frequency and Percentage of Participant Responses to Perceptions of Current Implementation of Diverse Perspectives in Schools

	Materials		Isolated Events		Curriculum		Inclusion		No Observed Implementation	
	Frequency	Percentage of Students with Response in Level	Frequency	Percentage of Students with Response in Level	Frequency	Percentage of Students with Response in Level	Frequency	Percentage of Students with Response in Level	Frequency	Percentage of Students with Response in Level
Level I	7	46.67	12	80.00	3	20.00	0	0	2	13.33
Level II	9	27.27	14	42.42	14	42.42	6	18.18	7	21.21
Level III	11	52.38	15	71.43	6	28.57	1	4.76	3	14.29
Level IV	17	50.00	23	67.65	11	32.35	5	14.71	1	2.94

Table 4

Frequency and Percentage of Participant Responses to Perceptions of Ideal Implementation of Diverse Perspectives in Schools.

	Level I		Level II		Level III		Level IV	
	Frequency	Percentage of Students with Response in Level	Frequency	Percentage of Students with Response in Level	Frequency	Percentage of Students with Response in Level	Frequency	Percentage of Students with Response in Level
Exposure or Knowledge of Other Cultures	6	40.00	6	18.18	3	14.29	11	32.35
Anti-Bias Curriculum	1	6.67	3	9.09	1	4.76	7	20.59
Inclusion/Integration	9	60.00	18	54.55	11	52.38	13	38.24
Respect, Tolerance, Awareness, Appreciation, Recognition of Similarities and Differences, Acceptance	6	40.00	14	42.42	6	28.57	13	38.24
Stereotyping	2	13.33	2	6.06	0	0	4	11.76
Segregated Enrichment	3	20.00	1	3.03	0	0	2	5.88
Minor Component of Curriculum or Non-Importance	2	13.33	3	9.09	2	9.52	8	23.53
No Response	0	0	0	0	1	4.76	0	0